

UNCLAS ABIDJAN 000475

BT  
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: PGOV ASEC ECON ELAB AMGT IV  
SUBJECT: GENERAL STRIKE LARGELY SUCCESSFUL; NEGOTIATIONS  
WITH GOVERNMENT UNDERWAY

REF: A. ABIDJAN 467  
    B. ABIDJAN 452  
    C. ABDIDJAN 214

**11. (U) Summary.** The members of UGTCI, the country's largest federation of unions, overwhelmingly observed its call for a general strike on July 17 and 18 to call for salary increases in response to the gas price hike, following some initial confusion. Taxi and mini-bus transporters maintained their strike throughout the week, to protest increases in gas prices. The government responded quickly to the strikes by meeting with union representatives on July 17 and 18. A meeting of senior government officials, presided over by the Prime Minister, has been scheduled for July 19 to examine the situation and make recommendations to an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers, presided over by the President, scheduled for Sunday, July 20.

## Union Activity

12. (U) Strikes in the transport sector in reaction to increases in gas prices continued on July 17 and 18, mostly in Abidjan's working class neighborhoods. Representatives of transportation unions met with President Gbagbo the evening of July 16 and later called for their workers to return to work while negotiations with the government were ongoing. Despite this call most minibus and taxi drivers remained on strike. There are many transport unions and they are not unified under a strong confederation. Interior Minister Tagro reportedly met on July 17 with representatives of transport worker unions who had not participated in the meeting with President Gbagbo. Public bus transport remained available in most parts of the city, except for the Abobo district where residents physically impeded buses from entering the zone.

¶3. (U) The General Union of Workers of Cote d'Ivoire, UGTCI, general strike was generally observed. (There was some initial confusion on July 17 due to the fact that the transport union leaders asked their followers to return to work.) According to the UGTCI, its call for a strike was observed by 98 percent of its members in Abidjan and 86 percent outside of the city. Since UGTCI represents workers in both the public and private sectors, both government offices and private businesses were affected by the strike. UGTCI met with Interior Minister Desire Tagro on July 17 and was to draft concrete proposals that it would present to Tagro that evening. UGTCI plans to hold a general assembly on July 19 to assess the results of the strike and decide on a future course of action.

## Government Response

14. (U) As with the demonstrations against increases in food prices (Refel C), the government has responded quickly. The Prime Minister was scheduled to have three meetings on July 18; one with consumers' associations; another with the three confederations of workers' unions, of which UGTCI is one; and a meeting with all associations of transport vehicle owners and drivers.

15. (U) A Council of Government meeting, which is presided over by the Prime Minister and attended by all Ministers and, as appropriate, by their top aides, has been scheduled for July 19 to examine strikers' demands. The decisions and recommendations reached at the Council of Government meeting will then be examined at a Council of Ministers meeting on July 20, which is presided over by the President and attended only by the Prime Minister, Ministers, and the Secretary General of the government, who acts as notetaker.

16. (SBU) Although the government is eager to see the strikes end, budgetary constraints will make the salary increases called for by the UGTCI difficult. Responses that the government might consider to lessen the effects of the public's shrinking wallets include an increase in workers' transportation allowances or other fringe benefits, a small reduction in the increase of gas prices, or establishment of a special fund for development of the transport sector. Abidjan residents are hopeful that the July 19-20 meetings will result in a solution that all parties can accept.

## Security

**17. (U)** This week's strikes have not been accompanied by significant violence and major roads have not been blocked. In some neighborhoods, residents threw rocks at public buses and taxis that defied the strike, but private vehicles have been able to circulate without difficulty.